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It's Unthinkable But It Might Be Christian

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NCR Today

All the medical studies show the same thing -- lots of bangs on the head by guys in football helmets lead to brain failure, mental illness and early death.

No question about it. So shouldn't it be, so to speak, a no-brainer? Quit doing it. Don't clamp the pads on the kids and goad them into tearing into each other?

But the rabid loyalty to this barely sublimated tribal warfare guarantees that the terrible price paid for ringing each others' bells will be denied, ignored and rationalized. And these are our kids. We still think it's more important for our boys to prove themselves on the gridiron than to prevent their minds from falling to pieces.

The absurdity of this dishonesty came to the fore this past week when the Ivy League was actually praised for being in the "vanguard" of progress by limited "full pad" hitting to two practices a week. The NCAA allows five, so this is seen as a major step forward.

It's as if in Russian roulette some decide to allow live bullets in the chamber only 40 percent of the time. The Ivy League, no fool in the matter of gaining attention, deserved or not, is hailed for what is at best a half-way measure.

Which brings me to the colleges that exist under the banner of Christianity: Baylor, Notre Dame, Syracuse, Brigham Young and hundreds of others who justify risking the welfare of young men in the name of such higher callings as alumni support and a taste for combat.

None of them has gone even as far as the Ivy League's pathetic gesture. Obviously the religiously affiliated schools are so enmeshed in worldly values like prestige and money that anything like a

Christian consideration is laughed out of the room, but forfeiting that consideration further robs Christianity of its own beliefs and insights.

I watch football and feel the combative juices flowing in urging my side on, but I wouldn't want my son to play the game, nor do I like what watching it does to me.

Given the hysteria over the impending return of the NFL and the fevers of opening days in college football, however, such qualms held by those like myself are dismissed as exaggerated or wimpish -- they are pebbles off a tank.

But I'm appalled that in an American climate seemingly obsessed with health, especially of children, this one gets practically erased in the rush to find vindication on the football field. The brains of kids are being addled, the dire results of which are often delayed for decades, yet the great mainstream of Christian churches and their colleges march down the field as if it were only a false alarm from party poopers.

If football is that legendary substitute for war, then it's also the outlet for religious fanaticism. Religion and sports feed off of each other's enthusiasms. In most sports, it's a relatively harmless mixture. In football, it's deadly.

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